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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001285

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08-04-14

TAGS: PREL PHUM EAID MV

SUBJECT: Request for funds to support National Democratic Institute work in Maldives

Refs: (A) State 161361

- (B) USDEL 12

- (C) Colombo 1012, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

¶1. (U) This is an Action Request -- Please see Para 5.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Lunstead received a letter from Maldivian Attorney General Hassan Saeed requesting financial assistance to augment efforts toward political reforms in the Maldives. The text of the letter is contained in Para 7. Specifically, the AG is requesting USG funds to enable the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to undertake projects in Maldives.

¶3. (SBU) STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY: In an effort initiated by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the Maldivian government is undertaking significant steps to strengthen democratic principles in Maldives (Ref C). A special session of the Majlis (Parliament) has been convened to develop constitutional reforms and all Maldivian citizens were asked to provide suggestions. During a July 1 refueling stop in Maldives, Secretary Powell spoke with Foreign Minister Fathulla Jameel, encouraging Maldivians to continue in their efforts toward democratic and political reform (Ref B).

¶4. (C) In a July 25 conversation with the Ambassador, Attorney General Saeed pointed out that it is almost certain that political parties will be legalized as a result of the ongoing constitutional reform process. (At present, the GORM does not recognize political parties.) Saeed highlighted the fact that the majority of Maldivians -- who do not live on the capital island of Male' -- are completely unfamiliar with the concept of political parties. Therefore, he felt that the assistance that a group such as NDI could provide would be crucial for outreach efforts to build capacity and understanding on these issues throughout the islands.

¶5. (C) ACTION REQUEST: The "bang per buck" for a program like this in Maldives would be considerable. Mission requests DRL's strong consideration of Maldives' request for assistance in organizing political parties, whether through NDI or another NGO such as IRI. END ACTION REQUEST.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: As we have previously noted (example, Ref C), this is a sensitive transition period for Maldives, but one which holds great promise. An attempt is being made to move forward with positive, democratic reform. Failure of this process could mean that the positive impulse for reform could be diverted into negative channels such as Islamic radical/fundamentalist groups. There is no USAID Mission to Maldives, so other avenues for assistance are severely limited. Mission has an active military-to-military assistance program. The IVP program for Maldives is robust, including an upcoming program for members of the newly formed Human Rights Commission. Mission also recently received approval for a small DRL grant to fund a labor seminar and technical expertise exchange for the Human Rights Commissioners (Ref A). The Secretary noted July 1 that the United States was extremely impressed with President Gayoom's commitment to reform. We believe we should support Maldives as comprehensively as possible in these efforts toward becoming a truly democratic Muslim nation. END COMMENT.

¶7. (SBU) Text of the letter from Maldivian Attorney General follows:

Begin text:

H.E. Mr. Jeffrey J. Lunstead,

Your Excellency,

As you would be aware the Maldivian Government is undertaking political reform to strengthen democratic institutions in the country. As outlined the President's to the nation on the 9th of June 2004 the Government is

desirous of fundamental rights, separation of powers, reduction of presidential powers etc. Further, for the first time in the Maldivian history, political parties would be given a role in the governance of the country.

With such major changes proposed it is the Government's wish to adopt systems and institutions that are most appropriate in the context of the Maldives.

In this regard I write to seek your assistance in securing the assistance of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs in the changes proposed. It is our knowledge that the Institution has done admirable work in strengthening democratic institutions and greater democratization round the globe.

At this opportunity let me thank you for the valuable support provided to us at every junction.

Let me also congratulate you on your independence day.

With the assurances of my highest consideration.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely

Hassan Saeed  
Attorney General (Maldives)

End text.

LUNSTEAD